

Recovery – Chapter 1

“I’ve been reading some of the stories and other posts on some of those websites. We really need to do something about getting prepared.”

“Oh honey, it’s so expensive and we don’t have that much put back. Where would we start?”

“One idea I saw had a lot of appeal, double buying at the grocery store. The idea is that you either buy extra when it’s on sale or just buy twice as much as you would normally. With the way food prices are rising, we’d be money ahead.”

“Oh, I thought you were talking about buying those long term storage foods.”

“I think we might, eventually. But with a little extra effort on our part, we could make our own super pails.”

“What’s a super pail?”

“A six gallon food grade pail, lined with a plastic bag, filled with one type of food, oxygen absorbers added and the bag sealed. Finally, you seal the pail so it’s air tight. I checked with both donut shops and they’ll sell us their used pails for a buck each. They’re five gallon, not six, but we’d just use more.”

“What would we store?”

“I can get corn, oats, soybeans, barley and wheat at the grain elevator. I saw one of those stock boys refilling their pinto beans in the produce section and talked to the manager. He can get any kind of bean we want in 100 pound bags. That includes pinto, great northern, navy, kidney, black or small pink.”

“What kind of rice, regular or Minute?”

“Why do you ask?”

“It seems when I hear people talking about beans, the next item they bring up is rice.”

“We could drive up to Des Moines and buy that imported rice in 50 pound bags from Costco. We should hit Sam’s Club and get the things they carry in bulk packages that Costco doesn’t.”

“What has you so worked up?”

“Have you read the news recently? North Korea and Iran scare the crap out of me, they’re real flakes. China has been building its military for the past 10 years. And, the new president, well, you know how I feel about his efforts so far.”

“Do you think there will be a war?”

“Eventually, for sure; it’s just a question of when, not if. Besides, bin Laden could always orchestrate another terrorist attack.”

“Now, you’re scaring me.”

“Look Cheryl, from what I’ve read, it is possible to prepare on a budget. For example, the basement can be turned into a shelter at a reasonable cost if we do the labor. It’s ten feet deep and could easily hold a two foot thick cover of solid concrete block. There are a few things I’d prefer to buy rather than jury rig, but we could do it over time.”

“I’ll tell you what Alan, you start your super pail project and I’ll start double buying. We’re going to need more shelving in the basement.”

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That conversation occurred just after North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, which apparently was a failure. Three years later, the super pail project, the double buying project and modifying the basement into a shelter project were almost complete. My Christmas bonus each year went into preps. The first year, we bought masks, filters, suits, boots, gloves, etc. from Approved Gas Masks. The second year, the bonus paid for two good used 1911 pistols with extra magazines plus ALICE gear and ammo. We were accumulating money for the finishing touches on the basement, an air filtration system and blast door from American Safe Rooms, Inc. Except, the system was only good for 3,500ft³ and our basement was 12,800ft³. We had to get 4 filtration systems to be sure.

In addition to the 1911s, I had my old 870 in 12 gauge, a Winchester .30-30 and a Remington .22 rifle. Back when they were inexpensive, dad bought me a Ruger Mini-14. Although it took Cheryl a while to get accustomed to the recoil of the .45, she did. She got the Mini-14 along with the pistol. I wanted a .30 caliber military rifle, preferably a semi-auto. I’d settle for good used, if necessary. I’m sure as the sun rises in the east that, had we had children, we’d have lacked the money for our preps.

I also wanted a generator and fuel to tide us over if we ever needed to use the basement as a shelter. PV panels were expensive as were the charge controllers, inverters and batteries. We didn’t really get enough wind to use wind turbines. Finally, Cheryl announced that we had enough set aside for the blast door and shipping. I called and ordered it and sent a check by overnight mail. The air filtration system was installed next.

Our place in northern Missouri had been the homestead for a farm. The original owner had a 3,000 gallon propane tank. Both the old wood/coal furnace and the newer propane furnace were in the basement with the propane furnace hooked up. We were just a short way from Bethany and I-35. I worked in Bethany for a construction firm and

Cheryl worked in a restaurant. Cheryl was born and raised in the Chicago area and we met when I'd made a trip to the Windy City for something. Since she worked the evening shift, we had a garden and canned. Over time, we'd amassed a large collection of quarts, pints and jelly jars.

We'd picked up a used All American 30 quart pressure canner at a garage sale for \$50. That, plus our older Presto pressure canner was more than enough to handle any canning Cheryl did. It was my job to take the cooled jars to the basement and add the cases to the shelving when I got off work. In addition to canning the produce, we bought beef when it was on sale and canned it, too.

I had two gun dealers keeping an eye out for a good used .308 semi-auto. We set aside my Christmas bonus and Cheryl's tips to pay for the rifle, magazines and ammo. Other than the rifle, the only things really lacking were the radiation equipment, generator and gas detection strips. We were holding off on the equipment hoping for a rifle to come on the market.

"Are you still in the market for a .308 rifle?"

"I suppose it depends on what it would cost, its condition and so forth, but basically yes."

"I sold a Springfield Armory M1A to a guy on November 5th of last year. It's the Loaded model. Long story short, the guy suddenly decided that he needed the money for something else and sold me the rifle back. I low balled it and can let you have the rifle for a lot less than retail."

"I guess I'd need more information. What condition is the rifle in, walnut or McMillan stock, how many rounds through it, etc."

"McMillan stock, looks brand spanking new, he claims he only put 100 rounds though it. Eleven ninety-five plus tax."

"How many magazines?"

"One 10 round and seven CMI 20 round. He bought two cases of South African from Aim Surplus and wanted to unload it. Normally, I don't buy ammo, but it was still in the battle packs. He must have bought five extra battle packs because both ammo cans are full at 1,260 rounds each and there are two extra 20 round boxes."

"How much for the ammo?"

"Well, if you buy the rifle, two hundred per can, I only gave him a hundred per."

"Can you hold it until Saturday?"

“Are you buying or looking?”

“Buying.”

“It’s 3 percent extra if you use a credit card.”

“It will be cash.”

“See you Saturday.”

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“The gun dealer in Des Moines called.”

“What about?”

“He had a nearly new M1A for \$1,195 plus tax. If we buy the rifle, he’ll sell us over 2,500 rounds of surplus for \$400.”

“That’s going to cut us short. We have about \$1,300 in savings plus both of our paychecks. Is it a good deal? Are you sure this is what you want?”

“It’s an outstanding price. The ammo is probably worth the price he is asking for the rifle.”

“Ok. When are we going to Des Moines?”

“Day after tomorrow, if you’re sure.”

“What does that leave incomplete?”

“Installing the blast door and buying the radiation equipment. My bonus should cover the radiation equipment. I planned on buying the package plus two additional meters, a CD V-700 and a CD V-717. Other than that, the generator and fuel.”

Cheryl drove an old Chrysler with a slant six and my pickup, a Chevy, had the motor replaced with a GM pre-electronic boxed diesel. We kept our 500 gallon farm tank filled and stabilized with PRI-G. A couple of years back, I’d bought a case of G (six gallons) and four of D (24 gallons) from a place in Oregon. With it only being such a short distance to Bethany, we didn’t use a lot of fuel. The pickup was far newer than her car. The guy had been converting it to a bug out vehicle and had the engine swapped and fuel tanks changed/added. That’s as far as he got; he worked construction and was trapped when a ditch he was working in collapsed. We hadn’t done anything to the pickup except stabilize the fuel.

I figured that the diesel tank for the generator would serve as a backup fuel supply for the pickup. On Saturday, we drove to Des Moines and I bought the rifle, using my Iowa driver's license. I also had a Kansas driver's license, all three in different names. My Missouri license was in my actual name, Alan Jackson. I'd read about the process on the internet and decided to give it a try. It worked and I simply continued to renew the licenses over the past 10 years.

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Christmas of 2009 saw us acquiring the package plus from KI4U. We were now down to the generator and fuel. We had a Chicago Electric single phase portable 5kw, but I wanted a whole house setup and enough fuel for at least one year. I kept looking and found a Kohler 30REOZJB with a 120/240 volt 4Q4W alternator. The engine needed to be rebuilt and it didn't come with an automatic transfer switch. A buddy rebuilt the engine and I installed a manual transfer switch.

In the spring of 2010, I dug down 10' from the basement wall and built a block room for the generator and installed an oval culvert to connect the room to the basement. A local service station was replacing its old tanks with new, larger tanks and I managed to get a 14,000 gallon tank they'd used for gasoline. I cleaned it out and buried it, connecting a fuel line and return line to the generator before backfilling the hole. By mutual consent, the only outside purchases we made, beside groceries, for the remainder of 2010 and all of 2011 was diesel fuel, 1,000 gallons at a time.

Around Christmas of 2011, I began to look at .50 caliber rifles. I was like many and wanted a Barrett, but they were so expensive. I had pretty much resolved myself to getting a single shot when dad died. My share of the estate wasn't huge, but it did pay for the rifle, a Tac-50 with a Nightforce scope and 2 magazines. I could consistently shoot $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ MOA with my .308 and about the same with the new rifle. It beat the new AWB by a matter of months and I bought the rifle in Kansas. A person didn't want to use a lot of the .50BMG ammo, not at four bucks a pop.

I got a 20" improved cylinder barrel for the 870, a Choate magazine extension and a sidesaddle. We managed to buy some 00 and #4 buck before the AWB went into effect and added slugs later. We also got a mixed case of hunting loads, just in case. We found more of the CMI mags at a gun show and paid cash for 14 more. We also bought several of the genuine Ruger 20 round mags for Cheryl's rifle. Our last purchase for our armory was 1,000 rounds of 230gr Gold Dot.

The passage and signing of the new AWB was not the smartest move in an election year. Between the economy, the continued housing slump, additional corporate failures and the new laws that the president had pushed, his popularity was lower than Dubya's had been. A nuclear test was attributed to Iran and North Korea successfully tested two longer range solid-fueled missiles. The world was becoming more dangerous by the day.

The firm I worked for was small and generally did one job at a time. We had both a building crew and a repair crew and the repair crews were far busier than those of us on the construction crew. The owner said that unless new building starts increased, there might not be Christmas bonuses this year and, for sure, no pay raises.

Years before, my reading had led me to believe that the true key to surviving come what may lay in preparedness. If your house took a direct hit from a warhead or some natural disaster, you'd be just as dead, prepared or not. However, those cases aside, you needed the preparations to get you started on the road to recovery. Cheryl and I didn't have the fancy freeze dried foods but we had a large freezer in the basement we kept filled and rotated. We had our one year supply of diesel fuel and plenty of gasoline and propane. Plus, almost 40 cords of wood gathered about a pickup load at a time.

The location was less than ideal, we were almost downwind of Kansas City so, if a war went nuclear, we might get a fair amount of fallout. There wasn't really a limit on how long we could shelter. Based on what I'd read, nukes generated ~3,000R at the blast site. The radiation level would fall below 100mR within 1 year. If we were conservative in our use of electricity, the fuel could last close to two years.

That fall, the president was not reelected and was replaced by a conservative Republican who had a lot to say on the campaign trail about Iran and North Korea. He even had a few choice words about the China and Taiwan situation. He had a bare majority in both houses of new Congress, not enough to allow for a cloture vote.

"Honey, did you see the story on the news?"

"I saw several, which one?"

"The report on North Korea."

"No, what was that about?"

"They're massing troops north of the DMZ."

"He's only been in office a year! He just can't wait to start something. Well, China didn't support his father near the end."

"But, they've decided to support him."

"Plus Iran is supported by both Russia and China. Why is it that all the petty dictators get support from those two?"

"Probably because they're willing to provide those petty dictators with weapons."

"Did the White House have any comment?"

“Just that they were studying the matter.”

“Well, he did say in his inauguration speech that the US wouldn’t be the first country to use nukes.”

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“Have the fleets sortied?”

“Everything we could put to sea is at sea.”

“And the DEFCON is at three?”

“Yes, Mr. President. The bombers are loaded and all available; refueling transports are on 15 minute standby.”

“Now, we sit and wait. We won’t start it, but we surely will stop it.”

The phone buzzed.

“Yes, Helen, what is it?”

“The DCI.”

“Ok, show him in. Stay here General, you’ll need this intelligence.”

“Mr. President.”

“Mr. Director. I asked the General to stay and hear your briefing.”

“Ok. North Korea has all available forces at the border. We don’t have a good feel on when they’ll cross the DMZ. Satellites show that Iran has their missiles ready to launch at a moment’s notice. China has managed to deploy about half of their Army across from Taiwan. We haven’t seen any sign of transport ships yet.”

“Where is the remainder of their forces?”

“Half on the border with North Korea and the rest spread out around the country to maintain order. Israel is at the highest state of alert. We believe that they have several squadrons of aircraft equipped with nuclear bombs on alert.”

“What about those Russian subs?”

“The new subs are loaded and at sea.”

“General, get those SSGNs moved to location and armed with TLAM-Ns.”

“Yes sir, they’re already swapping out the cruise missiles.”

“There’s just one other thing Mr. President.”

“Go ahead.”

“The Muslim nations in the Middle East are massing forces around Israel.”

“What are the odds that this thing gets out of hand?”

“For sure 50-50, but more likely 75-25.”

“I almost wish I’d have lost. I’ll have Homeland Security raise the Threat Level to Orange and we’ll think about going to DEFCON 2.”

“I think it’s time to begin evacuation plans Mr. President.”

“Make it happen.”

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“Oh, oh.”

“What?”

“The Threat Level was just raised to Orange.”

“I’ll call and have all of the tanks topped off. We’ll keep the NOAA NWS SAME radio on from now on. We should move anything we might need down to the basement including the portable generator.”

“We should go shopping and pick up some extra jeans, fleece lined coats and extra boots or shoes.”

“Make a list Cheryl and we’ll do it first thing in the morning. What did you have in mind?”

“Well...you like to wear western cut clothes because of your slim build so I was thinking just buying western clothes.”

“How much?”

“All we can afford after paying for the fuel and filling in our groceries.”

“We’re short on some things that might be nice.”

“Like what?”

“Horses, tack, cowboy guns, ammo...”

“You pick up the ammo; I bought the guns already for our birthdays.”

“With scabbards and holsters?”

“Yes. You’ll want to buy .45-70 and .45 Colt ammo.”

I managed to get 260 rounds of .45-70-405 full power ammo and 500 rounds of Colt .45 full power ammo. They told me it would take two days to get more in and I told them I’d take the same amount if they could get it. At the western store, we got top of the line Outback Drover’s coats, the Tasman, with the fleece linings, yellow dusters, shirts, jeans and boots. Another clothing store provided new sets of underwear. Our last stop was the grocery store where we got sugar, flour, yeast, shortening and personal things for Cheryl plus all the coffee and toilet paper they had on the shelf.

When we got home and finished unloading everything into the basement, I checked the answering machine for messages. The owner of the construction firm called to say that he was shutting down the construction crews until late March. My sister called from St. Louis to say that she hoped we had a nice Christmas and that she just called to say Hi. I called back but got no answer and their machine wasn’t on.

Alice’s husband was rather liberal and didn’t believe in preparedness. She tried double buying and other scheme’s to keep extra food on the shelf, but he always berated her efforts and she finally gave up. They were an unlikely pair and I’d always wondered what she saw in him. We’d gotten a bite to eat in town and once everything was put away and calls returned, we sat down to watch TV. Intending on watching a movie, we got caught up in a Fox News Special. They were recounting various events that led up to where the country was at the moment.

Did Homeland Security give any reason for raising the Threat Level?

Not that I’ve heard Shep. Speculation is that the military is at a heightened alert status too, DEFCON 3.

Well there you have it folks, this is the fourth time we’ve been at DEFCON 3. The first time was the Cuban Missile Crisis, the second the Yom Kippur War and the third on 9/11. Jonathan has an update. Jonathan?

Shep, the White House has just announced an Air Defense Emergency.

“Crap. Move the contents of the refrigerator to the basement while I shut down everything.” I turned off the TV.

“Air Defense Emergency?”

“Incoming missiles.”

I took the first armload down and put it on the counter and then went to the generator room and fired up the generator. When it was running smoothly, I flipped the manual transfer switch and went back upstairs. I grabbed our go bags from the bedroom, turned off the SAME radio and disconnected the TV from the outlet and antenna. I returned to help Cheryl move things from the pantry to the basement.

Understand; nobody in their right mind would intentionally lob a warhead on Bethany, population circa 3,000 in the 2010 census. We're on I-35 and the first large town south of the Iowa border. Kansas City was to our SSW. Most visitors stop to buy gas, cigarettes and fireworks out by the Interstate. The next largest category is those stopping to get something to eat, usually fast food at the interchange.

“Here.”

“What's this?”

“The invoices for the fuel fill ups.”

“They can track me down.”

“What now?”

“I'll help you make up the bed, I guess.”

“At least we didn't see bright lights in the distance.”

“After we get the bed made, let's pop some popcorn and watch the movie like we planned to.”

“Ok, anything but Clint Eastwood.”

While she fixed the popcorn, I hooked up the CD V-717. It would be up to her to select the movie. It seemed appropriate, *Terminator*. We cuddled, watched the movie and ate our popcorn. It was just your routine end of the world. When the movie ended, I checked the survey meter and it was still on the peg. I had an eclectic collection of radios. My ham radio was a used Kenwood TS-2000 radio. Our CB base station was a Washington model President/Uniden. We had 2 pairs of FRS/GMRS radios and 2 40 channel CB handi-talkies.

I couldn't concentrate on the movie and my thoughts included her family near Chicago and my sister in St. Louis. I also thought about the new guns she'd purchased, 2 Marlin 1895 Cowboys and 2 used original Ruger Vaqueros, one with a 7½" barrel and the oth-

er with a 5½” barrel. The gun belts were do-it-yourself John Wayne rigs, a holster with a 25 loop cartridge belt.

Recovery – Chapter 2

“Is it ok if I put on another movie?”

“Not sleepy?”

“We spent all day shopping for just in case things and we get home to find out that it’s the end of the world as we know it. I need a tranquilizer or a sleeping pill.”

“I just hope we bought enough things.”

“It doesn’t matter, we ran out of money. We probably have a 3 year supply of food, 18 months’ worth of meat, paper products for who knows how long and a really spiffy shelter. Worst case, we’ll be out of here in a year, best case, a month.”

“I’ll get you a Benadryl.”

“Make it a 50.”

It wasn’t long before she started to nod off and I sent her off to bed with a goodnight kiss. I returned to the survey meter to see if the needle was off the peg and it was, just barely. I assumed I’d have to stay up to switch ranges and got up my laptop to read some pdf files I’d downloaded. I had quite the collection of files, a little on most subjects. I ended up reading the owner’s manual for my ham radio.

We had a MFJ 10-band vertical mounted on a 4-section Radio Shack 39’ guyed mast. One standoff held a StarDuster CB antenna, also used, and although there was no 70cm antenna, there was an antenna standoff, just in case. There was nothing wrong with most of our stuff; it was used, but good used. Neither of us had ever owned a new car, either. Let the other guy eat the first year depreciation. I took the last cup of coffee and turned off the pot. Cheryl was sleeping soundly and I returned to my reading. My new hat was identical to my existing hat, a Resistol 6X El Simbolo with a 4” brim in buckskin color. It was part of their Premier Collection.

As far as how I felt about the situation, I was basically numb and very happy Cheryl and I were of like minds concerning preparedness. I was really hoping that a bunch of bad guys didn’t find our home and shoot it up. But, that was buying trouble; we were safely locked up in the basement at the moment. Since someone had to watch the meter, I stayed up until she was up and had her coffee. I used the bathroom and went to bed. I had been up 24 hours and was exhausted.

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I got up later in the day and used the bathroom and took a shower.

“What have the readings been like?”

“They went up, leveled off and started to fall. Then later, they went back up. I’ve been plugging the higher readings into the spreadsheet. I doubt that it’s Kansas City or Omaha. It happened at about 20 plus hours in, where do you think it was?”

“What’s the wind speed?”

“High; between 15 and 20mph and gusting to 30...”

“Denver or Colorado Springs, I think. Both probably took multiple hits. What’s the reading now?”

“One hundred Rads per hour.”

“That fits. Plug 3,000 into the spread sheet and check 20 hours elapsed time.”

“You’re right, ~100R/hr.”

“Ok, figure about 240 days for it to drop below 100mR/hr. Let’s try and minimize our power consumption. I’m going to shut down the furnace to minimized propane consumption. We have sweaters in our go bags. What do you have for breakfast?”

“I had pancakes, orange juice and coffee. It’s 3pm, would you rather have lunch?”

“I could use a sandwich.”

“Tuna salad ok?”

“Sounds good.”

One of the problems I had anticipated regarding a long shelter stay concerned keeping physically fit. I had a weight set and could do crunches, pushups and pull-ups. Jogging was out of the question because of space limits. I decided that starting tomorrow I’d spend up to an hour exercising before I took my shower. While I had included a coed bunk room, it wasn’t needed and I decided to exercise in there.

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One of the oft heard mottos *was prepare for the worst and hope for the best*. All the time we were assembling our preparations, we both took that to mean either a tornado or one of us getting laid off. About the only thing Nature threw our way was the occasional tornado. When the housing bubble burst, getting laid off became a real possibility. There was little, if any, new home construction in the winter anyway. Those of us with seniority on the construction crew worked with the repair crew.

TOM claimed that bad things happened in threes. Sometimes they did, other times, they didn't. He's the one who got me interested in the M82, originally. Since most of his stories included a WW III scenario, with variations, they were educational. While we had a good shelter, it could have been better, like a separate shelter buried 10' deep. A person has to do the best they can with what's available. Our name is Jackson, not Rockefeller or Gates.

"I'm going to exercise and get a shower. What's the radiation reading?"

"It topped at 230R/hr and has been falling steadily. May I join you and work off some of this nervous energy?"

"Of course. I was going to use the bunk room, but with two of us, we'll just do it here."

"I'll change."

For the next 45 minutes or so, we did all that we could do in the basement. Cheryl showered and then fixed lunch when I took my turn. She fixed cube steak sandwiches with home baked bread and served fries. I decided to try the amateur radio and only picked up static. I grounded the antenna and left the radio out of the metal cabinet.

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"Your report?"

"Mr. President, we were hit by both Russia and China. They selected civilian rather than military targets although in a few cases, they're the same. We replied in kind, per your instructions and neither will be attacking anyone in the foreseeable future. North Korea invaded the south and we have the George Washington Carrier Strike Group lending aid as they're able.

"India retaliated against Pakistan and Pakistan launched its remaining missiles against India. They're engaged in face to face combat. When Iran launched its missiles, Israel immediately launched an all-out strike against Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia. They held their Jericho missiles in reserve. There are battles here and there around the world, mostly countries setting grudges.

"On a personal note, I'd like to thank you for heeding our advice and moving to Cheyenne Mountain and allowing us to bring our spouses."

"Congress?"

"We managed to move maybe half. That allowed those members to include their spouses and some family members. We used the Greenbrier, as instructed. Having it in the public view worked to our advantage because no one thought to attack it. Mount Weather took several hits and we have no contact with FEMA."

“It appears that CIAs latest assessment was right on the money. I had my doubts, but there was too much at stake. Did the DCI get out?”

“No sir. Only those who took his warning seriously made it to safety.”

“Any idea on a death toll?”

“It’s too early to tell; immediate deaths maybe 60 million. However, there will be the deaths due to radiation poisoning and disease. Plus, we simply can’t distribute medicines to those in need and more will die. The mountain took three warheads in the 300 kiloton range, none a direct hit. Denver and Colorado Springs are wastelands. DC is gone along with every major population center.”

“Our forces?”

“The B-2s delivered their ordnance and were recovered. We lost about half the B-52s. The SSGNs cleared port but weren’t in a position to deliver their missiles. The SSBNs delivered the first wave of their missiles and stood down per your order. We launched all of our Minuteman Missiles.”

“What about our troops?”

“They successfully sheltered to the limit of the shelter capacity. The Attorney General wants to see you sir.”

“Ok. Show him in and keep me up to speed.”

“Mr. President.”

“What is it Art, a pressing case?”

“It’s the Executive Orders Mr. President.”

“What about them?”

“Are you ready to invoke them?”

“No, we’ll wait. For crying out loud, people who have shelters are still in them. If I do invoke them, I assure you it will be on a limited basis. I want you to draw up a new one.”

“Doing what?”

“Suspending all federal firearms laws for the duration of the emergency. The Chief Justice seems to think it’s a good idea and very appropriate.”

“I protest.”

“Just get it done.”

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“Ok, this seems to be working out. I’ll take the night shift and you can take the day shift.”

“What about our families?”

“It’s hard to guess. Most of your family lives in De Kalb and that’s northwest of the city proper. Alice lives in St. Charles, almost directly west of St. Louis and close in. I’d tend to think your family did better than mine. We shall see what we shall see.”

I was keeping an eye on my Davis Weather Monitor II. The temperatures were falling and the average wind speed was around 10mph, gusting to 15mph. It was a discontinued model that I got from AES when I bought the Kenwood.

Cheryl had been right when she’d brought up the fact that we spent the day shopping for preparations only to have TSHTF after we got home. Dumb luck beats no luck. Sheppard Smith was in New York and Jonathan was in DC. I guess they went out with a bang. A very big bang.

We did find time to be together during our shift overlaps. For the most part, the shelter stay was very long and boring. When the radiation level fell to 0.5R/hr, we suited up and spent about 30 minutes outside. There wasn’t much to see except for snow and more snow. The sunlight was filtering through a heavy overcast of something, maybe residual fallout. The silence was deafening.

“I don’t know what I expected, but certainly not that.”

“Maybe Sagan was right. Did you see all of the debris in the atmosphere?”

“Yes, fallout?”

“Possibly. Or, a combination of fallout and smoke. Say, are your jeans loose?”

“As a matter of fact, they are. You?”

“Same thing, it must be the exercise.”

“And to think I was worried that an extended shelter stay would cause me to get fat.”

“I had the same fear, thus the exercise. What’s the spreadsheet say about when we’ll reach 100mR/hr?”

“About a month.”

“We’ll be hard as nails by then.”

“It’s going to be a different world we live in, isn’t it?”

“Oh yeah. At least I have a trade that might work in a barter economy. We can grow a larger garden and consider salvaging a greenhouse. It won’t take much to switch back to the wood/coal furnace and we have plenty of wood. We can check out coal fired power plants for coal. We’d have to empty the coal room, but that’s not a big deal.”

“Are we ok as far as woodcutting goes?”

“It’s a Stihl Professional with a 36” bar. I seriously overbought my chainsaw.”

“The coal?”

“Well, there are approximately 38.5ft³ in a short ton of coal. I assume whoever has the coal would have loaders so all we’d need would be a dump truck, some diesel and time.”

“Do you have an answer for everything?”

“As much as I try to, no. There’re just the two of us. That means unless we work with others, we’ll have to work together and you’ll have to act as guard while I’m doing whatever. I don’t like the idea of putting you at risk like that. Plus, it would leave our home unguarded while we’re gone.”

“I’m a big girl and have both a rifle and pistol.”

“Which you shoot well. But, I’m telling you, I’d feel a lot better if you had a .308 like mine.”

“You mentioned salvage. Maybe we can salvage one for me plus a shotgun. I can manage the recoil on your weapons.”

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Our first trip after we came out of the shelter was to Des Moines. I wanted to get Cheryl a rifle like mine, a shotgun and more ammunition. The gun store that we shopped at was locked up tight. However, a heavy pry bar eliminated that problem. He had another used M1A Loaded and 30 CMI magazines. I added Springfield Armory slings for both rifles, two Mossberg shotguns with ghost ring sights and all the ammo in any caliber/gauge we could use.

We swung by the Westside to check on Costco, but the door was standing open. When I checked, the warehouse had been cleaned out of every single food item. Food wasn't our problem so we returned home. We'd taken the pickup in case we found some food or supplies. It was an unnecessary waste of fuel. The service station at the off ramp in Bethany was taking on a load of diesel fuel and we checked the tanker. It was parked away from the fill lines and full. I jumped the battery and drove it back to our place while Cheryl followed me in the pickup. We went back to the off ramp and checked the cigarette store looking for trade goods. We cleaned them out, but it took 3 trips. Our next stop was to stock up on liquor for the same reason, trade goods.

"I set up the shotguns with 00 buckshot plus 6 slugs in the elastic stock shell carrier and 6 rounds in the sidesaddle. We can load up the magazines for the rifles to a full 20 rounds since the magazines are USGI. I also got some 8 round Chip McCormick magazines so we'll be carrying more rounds in the pistols. He only had ten, but that's enough for us. We need to get your rifle and shotgun sighted in plus my new shotgun."

"What about the coal?"

"Eighty-five percent of the electrical power in Missouri is generated with coal. Rather than use the local high sulfur coal, it's imported from Wyoming. I'd expect to find most power plants have a large reserve on hand to allow for delivery delays. We're not that far from Kansas City and their power is supplied by Kansas City Power and Light with several stations in Missouri. I know there's one on Montrose Lake because it was mentioned in a story. We'd have to detour to avoid fallout, but it can be done."

"How far is it?"

"If we allow for the detours, 200 miles one way. We could go down once or twice a week, weather permitting. We'll get a large County dump truck in Bethany."

Until the weather made the roads impassable, that's what we did, except it was 3 trips per week with Sundays off. When we had no more room to stack the coal, the weather turned really bad and it became a moot point. I assumed that our contribution to the carbon footprint was negligible since things had change so radically. There were survivors in Bethany and Cheryl ran into one of the gals she worked with, another waitress.

"You made it!"

"We had a shelter."

"Yes, we did too. Can you believe this? World War three. Just that day, we stocked up on clothing, groceries and some other things. When we came out, we went up to Des Moines, but Costco had been stripped of all the food."

"Did you check Sam's Club?"

“It was getting late.” (We didn’t think of it.)

“There’s an 18,000-gallon tanker of diesel fuel missing from one of the service stations and someone cleaned out the cigarette store at the interchange. Hy-Vee just got a delivery in that same day so they’ve been rationing food. I just wish Don and I weren’t in town. I don’t suppose you’d have room for us to set up our mobile home would you?”

“I’d have to talk to Alan about that. He has said that he doesn’t like it being just the two of us. What about power?”

“We have a diesel generator, but it’s a bear to move. We only got it recently, a few weeks before, you know...”

“I know one question that will come up. How are you and Don set in terms of firearms?”

“Don has a PTR-91 and I have a Savage 99A, his hunting rifle. We have two Beretta 92FS pistols, 12 and 20 gauge shotguns plus a 10/22.”

“Your kids have any firearms?”

“No, they’re too young.”

“Ok then, I’ll talk to Alan about it.”

When we got home, Cheryl first gave me a news report including the tanker and the cigarette store. Next, she brought up the issue of Don and Cindy. The only problem I could see with the proposition was our needing to find them a propane tank, install and plumb it. I had treated the diesel fuel and refilled our tank. However, we still had one full and one partial tank of diesel, plus dozens of full or partial cases of cigarettes in the basement. Cheryl and I drove in to see Don and Cindy the next day.

“I have a few more questions Don. Do you have any idea where we could get a large propane tank?”

“Probably Eagleville.”

“Can you install hookups to our water and septic?”

“As long as we can find the piping and fittings, yes.”

“Ok. What’s your attitude about the people who took that tanker and the people who cleaned out the cigarette store?”

“I don’t care about the tanker; someone was bound to get it. I sure wish I could find whoever cleaned out the cigarette store, I’m down to my last carton.”

“You’re not angry?”

“Well, the store operators are all dead so it’s no skin off my nose. We don’t have a diesel tank and only use the built in fuel tank on generator. It’s a used Cummins 30kw.”

“Did you serve in the armed forces?”

“Army, you?”

“Didn’t volunteer. Ok, as far as I can see, it’s a go. That’s provided we can get hookups installed and move your generator. We have the diesel tanker and whatever brand of cigarette you smoke.”

“I smoke Marlboro.”

“Apparently you and half the world.”

“Well, let’s go look for a propane tank and the plumbing.”

“You sure?”

“It will cost you a few cartons of smokes.”

“We also need to find a greenhouse big enough to grow food for both families. We have plenty of seeds, both hybrid and heirloom.”

“We have quite a few canning jars in our shed. Our canner needs a new seal.”

Over the course of the next few days, we located a 3,300 gallon propane tank, a propane delivery truck, another tanker load of diesel and all of the plumbing parts. We dug through the snow and down past the freeze line and hooked up water and septic. That generator weighed $\frac{3}{4}$ of a ton and was an effort to move. But we got it in and hooked up. We were really eating into my supply of PRI-D. That went on our shopping list right below horses.

We rigged a hose through a reducer on the tanker directly to the generator and Don and Cindy had 9,000 gallons of stabilized diesel immediately available. I found more PRI-D at a fuel distributor and added the final half gallon to the new tanker. We couldn’t travel due to the increasing snow and settled in for the winter. I had no idea where we’d find a greenhouse, but horses should be easier. Provided, that is, they survived the winter. We’d house the livestock in the barn and the chicken house, when we found livestock. I’d kept all of the out buildings up, just in case. While we could house animals now, we didn’t have any feed.

Don and I compared our rifles and other firearms. I suppose that his rifle weighed about the same as a mine or a bit lighter. It had a shorter barrel and the MSRP was lower than a

M1A. They'd purchased the Beretta pistols because of his Army experience. The shotguns were both Remington 870 Express combos. Their kids, a girl 14 and a boy 12, were named Susan and Donald. Don thought they were both old enough for firearms but Cindy didn't agree and he hadn't pressed it. He did say that if he could get a couple of short piston AR-15s with 1:7 20" barrels, he'd let them have rifles. As far as pistols went, if he could find 2 M1911s, the kids could have the Berettas.

The store in Des Moines had two Bushmaster rifles that met most of the criteria, provided they were still there when the snow melted. The barrels were 20", they had the short stroke gas piston conversion and 1:9 barrels. While we took the Ruger 20 round magazines, we left the case of 30 round M-16 magazines. We also took all of the 5.56x45mm ammo he had in stock.

"Now that's what I call a rifle. You have all of the bells and whistles. Do you have a nightscope?"

"I couldn't afford one on our budget. I didn't get that much from dad's estate."

"Do you have any Raufoss?"

"I have Barrett M-33."

"Any other ordnance?"

"A few smoke grenades I bought from Ammunition To Go. Do you have anything along those lines?"

"No, but I sure wouldn't mind getting some. You heard that the President issued an Executive Order suspending all federal firearms laws, didn't you?"

"We must have missed that. I didn't hear anything about Jefferson City being hit, what did the Governor say?"

"Nothing, he was in St. Louis."

"I hadn't heard that either. I have a very good radio but not much of an antenna. I should have gone the other way."

"Add it to the shopping list with some military ordnance. I think we should try Fort Leonard Wood. I'm not sure what we'll find, but it will be more than we have."

Recovery – Chapter 3

“Ok, the shopping list includes horses, tack, PRI-D, military ordnance and a night scope.”

“Don’t forget the rifles and pistols.”

“I know where there were 2 rifles meeting your general description except they have one turn in nine.”

“That would do nicely. Colts?”

“Bushmaster with 20” barrels and the short stroke gas piston conversion.”

“Add some red dot sights to the list. That was my last smoke. If you don’t mind...”

“They’re in the basement. Come on, we’ll get you some.”

“Hmm, you converted your basement into a shelter too. My problem was the low ceiling.”

“Our basement had a 10’ ceiling so there was ample room and we’re not that tall.”

“You sure seem to be in good shape for someone who spent months in a shelter.”

“We did exercise every day because of our limited mobility. I still need to jog and get my legs in better shape, but that will have to wait until the snow melts.”

“I get the distinct impression that you did everything on a budget and bought used several times.”

“We’re garage sale fanatics. In order to do it all, we had to hold the money awful close. As it was, there were things that would have been nice to have but not an absolute necessity.”

“For instance?”

“Horses and feed. Tack. Cheryl bought the cowboy guns, holsters and scabbards for birthday presents, but we don’t have horses. I figured to pick some up if we can find any that survived the winter.”

“Why horses?”

“They are a renewable resource. Cheryl’s car is about on its last legs and it’s going to be a challenge getting parts for my pickup.”

“Can her car be rebuilt?”

“Sure; if we can find the parts.”

“What about your pickup?”

“It’s a 6.2 liter pre-electronic GM boxed diesel. The transmission is manual so it’s easy to rebuild. The engines were used in the H-1 Hummer. It has a separate transfer case for four wheel drive.”

“And, I assume you bought it used.”

“There ya go.”

“Do you think we could get a county vehicle and bull our way to that gun store?”

“It’s in Des Moines but it is interstate most of the way so we could try.”

“Oh, I didn’t realize you meant that far.”

“Still, we should try. He carries an assortment of 1911 pattern pistols and we can probably get those while we’re there.”

“Does he carry western guns?”

“I didn’t see any; a hearty hi-ho Silver and away?”

“Well...”

“Honey, we’re going to try to get to Des Moines tomorrow. Do you need anything?”

“Lots of things Alan. Maybe we should get someone to watch the kids and go with you.”

“They aren’t going to like that, but we can get someone in Bethany to take them in for a few hours.”

“Cheryl, where did you buy the Marlins and Beretta Stampedes?”

“The same place we got our other guns.”

“Funny, I didn’t see any.”

“He doesn’t always have them on display. He had to get the ones I bought from his gun vault.”

“He has a gun vault?”

“Of course you ninny.”

“Cross your fingers, Don.”

We ended up taking my pickup because we couldn't get any of the county vehicles to start. There were only occasional drifts on I-35, but we made it in a little over 2 hours. The 2 Bushmaster rifles I'd seen were still on display and the magazines were undisturbed. We cut through the lock on the vault and found much more than we expected. Apparently, this guy was a class 3 dealer selling to either the Des Moines PD or the Polk County Sheriff.

We got 4 Kimber Custom Tactical IIs with extra magazines, 4 Bushmaster rifles, the case of M-16 magazines, a MUNS AN/PVS-27 night scope and suppressors for all of our military style rifles with threaded muzzles. It was about 2 miles to the JC Penny store in downtown Des Moines. The ladies went shopping while we stood guard. From there, we went to both of the Sam's Clubs Des Moines boasts, getting little. What we did get was most important, ladies supplies and bath tissue.

In case you're curious, the doctor said we were both fine and there was no reason why we couldn't have kids that he could find. Nevertheless, we were childless.

We decided to wait until spring to go to Fort Leonard Wood, but did begin looking for livestock, especially horses. We found a fair amount of feed and moved it to the barn. We managed to fill the loft with hay and straw. One silo was filled with corn and the smaller with oats. It was probably enough for several years. Eventually, we found a large flock of chickens and moved them, followed by 2 sows, a boar and several overweight pigs. But still, no horses or tack. Our next find was Angus cattle, several cows and a bull. The barn was filling, but still no horses or tack.

I was about to cave in and start looking for mules when we found the horses. Some were African horses, Barbs, and some were pure American, Morgan. The Morgan horses stood taller than the Barbs and were easily distinguished. We found more tack than we found horses, including harnesses and a buggy. It all came home with us, but I left a note in the dead man's hand.

When the roads were finally clear enough to go to the Fort without going through Kansas City, we set off. When we arrived, it was apparent that people had survived the war but had pulled out. Our shopping list was fairly short, grenades, rockets and ammo. We didn't find any rockets but there was a good supply of both 5.56x45mm and 7.62x51mm ammo and several cases of hand grenades. Don also came carrying a can marked Mk211. The can contained 120 rounds of Raufoss. There were several cans. We got a military trailer and I swapped out the hitch on my pickup and we took it all.

And then I worried all the way back to Bethany that we'd been seen. We were now well supplied, come what may.

“Did you find a greenhouse?”

“I wasn’t looking for one. Why, is one lost?”

“A little of that will go a long way. Remember we discussed getting a greenhouse?”

“I do. One of those authors, Jerry D. Young, mentioned greenhouses in at least one of his stories. One place I recall was Rolla. I’ll do a search for Hiram, the guy they got a greenhouse from.”

“I’ve got it, the other town was Union.”

“Which is closer?”

“Union. It’s southwest of St. Louis. Say, maybe I could check on Alice.”

“You could. I wonder if someone in De Kalb sells greenhouses.”

“We’ll try Union and then Rolla first. I don’t want to go that far north this early. We’ll check on your family this summer.”

“If we have a summer.”

“It usually follows spring and happens before autumn.”

“You know what I meant.”

“It’s not that far to De Kalb, a day’s drive. Go to Des Moines, turn right, pick up I-88 in Moline. It’s about 380 miles.”

“Ok, tomorrow go shopping for a greenhouse.”

We didn’t find Hiram in Union, so we went to St. Charles. My keychain alarm was giving off an occasional chirp and it had been for a very long time. Their house was still standing and locked up tight. We headed for Rolla, which turned out to be about 60 miles from Union. There we found greenhouses. Plus the owner of same.

“Help you?”

“We’re down from Bethany looking for a greenhouse.”

“I’m taking gold.”

“I don’t have any gold.”

“I do, let’s discuss this.”

“I sell the kits made by Texas Greenhouse Company. I have one hobby size and one large size, the American Classic, 30’ by 60’.”

“How much for the Classic?”

“Twenty ounces.”

“At what price per ounce?”

“Five hundred.”

“Gold last traded at two thousand an ounce. I’ll give you five ounces.”

“No sale.”

“Ok. Bye.”

“Wait!”

“What, a counter offer?”

“I just got the greenhouse in before the balloon went up. The company is in Fort Worth and Fort Worth got hit. So, ok, I’ll take the five ounces, they’ll never have a chance to bill me.”

“But we’ll have clear title?”

“This is a cash transaction and I’ll write John Doe on the sales order.”

“Are you sure the greenhouse is yours to sell?”

“You see that business license? You see my driver’s license? It’s mine alright. You’re going to need a bigger trailer.”

“Any semis with flatbeds sitting around?”

“That one across the street runs just fine. The driver isn’t with us anymore. Don’t know if it has enough fuel, but you can hope.”

“We have extra fuel, can you load the greenhouse?”

“After I see the color of your money I can.”

“One ounce American Eagles ok?”

“Perfect.”

I got to thinking and the original price was fairly low ball so this guy needed money desperately. He was only asking ten grand for something that probably sold for forty or fifty before the war. I didn't see how much gold Don had, just the five coins he produced, which were five more gold coins than we had. Nobody was keeping track, but I think we were beginning to get even. We had a Barb stallion, a Morgan stallion, six colts or fillies of each breed, several mares of each breed, lots of tack, new firearms and a new, un-assembled, greenhouse. We'd be able to get county equipment to use to assemble the greenhouse and that was our next order of business.

“Where did you get the semi?”

“It came with the greenhouse?”

“No, really.”

“Ok, we ended up in Rolla and the guy had a 30'x60' greenhouse. He wanted gold and gold only. Don had the gold and bought it. He told us we'd need a bigger trailer and that the semi and flatbed across the street was abandoned because the owner was dead. Alice's house was standing and locked up tight. I have no idea what became of them.

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A few years later, I ran into a surviving neighbor who told me they and the kids had attended a theatre performance in downtown St. Louis the night of the attack, thereby solving the mystery. The theatre was near one of the craters.

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“What do you think?”

“Water pipes and electrical conduit first. Then, put in the footings. When they're set up, we start erecting.”

“Alan, we're going to need grow lights.”

“We'll try an electrical supplier in Des Moines or Osceola.”

“Don't forget you promised Cheryl a trip to De Kalb.”

“Right; we'll go while the footings set up.”

If I'd had my construction crew, the footings were a one day job, start to finish. They took 4 days after the water and electricity was run. We left for De Kalb the next day,

hauling enough fuel for 2 round trips. Additionally, we took our BOBs and were armed to the hilt, only leaving the Tac-50 at home.

Cheryl's brother and family weren't home but her parents were and her brother and family were at their house.

"So, you made it. We did too, but got a touch of radiation poisoning. You stay away from Chicago proper; it's a no man's land with gangs covering most of the city. How did your sister do Alan?"

"I checked, but their house was locked up tight so I have no idea."

"Sit. Take a load off. Let's have coffee."

"Couldn't check around for her?"

"The area was on the ragged edge of hot. We went as far as we dared."

"Other than that, how have you been doing?"

"We have a greenhouse under construction and a garden started. I doubt we'll get much from the garden, limited sunlight and a little on the chilly side."

"Maybe we should look into a greenhouse. How big is yours?"

"Thirty by sixty. We'll need grow lights."

"I see you're armed for bear."

"We don't like taking chances. Anyway, if you're of a mind, there is room for everyone at our place."

"You have housing?"

"We could put in more mobile homes. You'd have to find the generators. We have a lot of diesel, get diesel if they're available. We can easily squeeze in two more singlewides."

"We'll have to talk it over. We know where you live, so it would simply mean finding the diesel generators."

"You should bring your washer, dryer and what furniture you want to keep, plus all of the food you have left."

"The food would fit in a picnic basket with room left over. Anything else?"

“Guns and ammo, if you have them.”

“Illinois isn’t very gun friendly.”

“So I’ve heard.”

“Have you two lost weight?”

“Actually no. We converted fat to muscle. It was a long shelter stay and we exercised a lot. By the way, we brought a cooler of meat and a box of staples.”

“We’d better get those to the Mrs.”

“Thanks, we’ll eat well tonight.”

We left the next day about noon. We had a firm commitment that they’d move almost immediately. They had enough fuel, and her brother Charles found a 24’ U-Haul truck and a 6x12 open trailer. They had a few weapons, shotguns and hunting rifles mostly. We hadn’t brought any spares and couldn’t help. We stopped at you know where in Des Moines and absolutely cleaned out the vault plus anything else they could use, like Cold Steel knives, a small sideline for the dealer.

We had to settle for two 1,100 gallon propane tanks. At least with the ground thawed, the installation of the pipes was easy. We went to the mobile home park and found two decent units, disconnected them and towed them home, one at a time. While we leveled and hooked them up, Cheryl and Cindy cleaned them up, disposing of burst cans and clearing the mess. There wouldn’t be room for another home.

They were a week getting from De Kalb to Bethany; they did some shopping along the way, spending time in Davenport and choosing from a gun store and a sporting goods store. The empty space in the truck was stacked high with selections from a Wal-Mart and some grocery stores.

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“Quite the set up.”

“We’ve been shopping Frank.”

“Post war no doubt.”

“Some of it yes. We were fairly well prepared before.”

“The livestock is new.”

“Fellow survivors.”

“Homes ready to go?”

“We haven’t looked for generators. They’re connected to water, septic and propane.”

“You said we’d have to supply our own power Alan. I made a trip to Kohler, Wisconsin before we left De Kalb. Got a matching set of 30kw and all the spare parts, filters and stuff we’d need for a long time. We didn’t move much furniture, it was old anyway. If the trailers are short anything, we can go shopping.”

“Well Charles that eliminates a major headache. We shopped for firearms for you on the way back.”

“We worked over Davenport pretty good on our way here. Say, what can you tell me about fuel stabilizers? We picked some up in De Kalb.”

“Power Research, Inc. aka PRI makes the best. They make products for gasoline and diesel.”

“Well good, I made the right choice.”

“Did you get some?”

“Two 55 gallon drums of PRI-D. I about got a hernia getting them loaded. There are also some 5 gallon and 1 gallon jugs of both PRI-D and PRI-G.”

“What kind of firearms did you find?”

“That gun store had 6 FN FALs and a bunch of H&K .45acp pistols. The Sporting Goods store had normal stuff like Remington shotguns, Ruger rifles, cowboy guns and ammo. Heck, we just grabbed what we could find that made any sense to have.”

“Just what did you actually bring from home?”

“Mostly our clothes and what little food we had. I never went looting before, it was kinda fun.”

“It wasn’t looting, it was salvaging.”

“I like the way you think.”

It was difficult to get some of the things from the overloaded truck. Once we had the generators down, we wired them directly into the fuse panels using the cables Charles brought. We could add manual transfer switches later, when we found some. Their new generators were identical to mine, providing us with more filters.

Cheryl and Cindy went all out for supper, two large beef roasts with onions, potatoes, frozen carrots and day old homemade bread. The trailers had fresh bedding with the dirty in the washer. If I had a concern, it was our old septic system. It hadn't been pumped out in all the time we lived here. I wondered if it had the capacity for four homes and the state of the leech field.

"The water is slow to drain."

"I was wondering last night. I think the best bet would be to replace the tank with something larger and install a new leech field. We get it done as fast as we can."

"Hey Alan, the sinks drain slowly."

"I already heard. Don, we're going to have to replace the septic system. We'll need an industrial sized tank and with KC gone, that means Des Moines. We'll have to oversize the leech field because they're almost impossible to clean."

We got a county backhoe and set Charles to digging a hole for a new septic tank. We'd run the 3 mobile homes off the new tank and leave our home on the old tank for now. Later, we could install piping to the new tank if it were necessary. Off we went to Des Moines, again; maybe we should just move up there.

We brought back a 3,000 gallon tank and enough piping to connect the trailers and enough leech line for a huge leech field. We're talking six lines 500' long. Cheryl flushed a package of Rid-X bacteria for our old tank while we worked on the new tank. For the moment, it was agreed that we only use our bath room and no baths or showers until the new system was installed. Needless to say, we worked late and had two trenchers running for the leech field.

It took 3 full days to get the system in and installed. The leech field line had to have just a little down slope but the new septic tank wasn't buried that deep, eliminating one problem. At the far ends, the leech field pipes were 12' deep or a shade over. Once the new system was in, our old system slowly began to function as before.

With four families here, the ladies could handle the eats and we could go hunting along the Interstate and primary roads for more diesel tankers. We had the fuel distributor where I got the extra PRI-D; however, with four generators, we'd burn through what he had on hand in two or three years. My plan was to go down I-35 as far as we dared and then switch to the mammoth fuel depot in Des Moines.

Recovery – Chapter 4

We were south on I-35 when the Missouri Army National Guard showed up in Bethany. They had small amounts of food and medicine and were doing a headcount. Word was that the Acting Governor of Missouri had decided it was in his best interest to suspend the Missouri gun laws for the duration; or, so we were told when we returned with 3 diesel tankers. A guard was at the off ramp.

“What’s in the tankers?”

“Diesel.”

“I’d imagine the Captain would like to have that.”

“I doubt it; it has been sitting on the interstate since the war.”

“If that’s the case, why did you get it?”

“Home heating oil; the furnace isn’t fussy.”

“Are you from Bethany?”

“No, we just decided to pull the 3 tankers off to get a few cartons of cigarettes and some fireworks. Yes, we’re from Bethany; got a homestead about 5 miles outside of town.”

The kid was young and probably just finished basic training before the balloon went up. Heck, I’ve got a pair of boots as old as he was. He told us to go to the courthouse to register. I wanted to move the tankers first and add the PRI-D and get it agitated in to do its thing. I told him in my best Arnold imitation, “I’ll be back.”

“The National Guard is in Bethany doing a census.”

“How much diesel did you get?”

“Fifty-five thousand. Is the drain working better?”

“Back to normal.”

“Good, I need a shower.”

“You sure do.”

“We’ll go register in the morning. Your parents can go with us and when we get back, your brother and his family can go with Don and Cindy.”

The pre-war population of Harrison County was 10,000 or less. The current population was, at best, 2,000. Even so, the government is the government and they take classes in slow. It took all morning for Frank and Rose, Cheryl and me to register. Don and Cindy with their two and Charles and June, with their three (Charles 15, David 14 and Jan 13) would be back very late.

Once registered, we started looking for more livestock feed. I half expected them to try and stick one of those RFID chips in us, but that would have been beyond their skill set. Not only did we collect a lot of corn, oats and hay, we found someone who had planted more for his cattle herd. We negotiated for his excess and ended up bartering labor for the grain and hay. He said he wouldn't have a lot of hay, but would increase his alfalfa the following year.

We made one more trip to Des Moines that summer to get seed corn and tie up a few loose ends. The farmer said we could substitute seed corn for labor. We also checked out the fuel depot and found more diesel than we could use. On the way back, we were shot at. I didn't give it a lot of thought; I went pedal to the metal and kept on trucking. My pickup had a new hole in the left side of the box about 2' behind the driver's seat and just below the top of the box.

Despite being heavily armed, we hadn't had a single confrontation since the war. However, the survivors had basically used up all remaining supplies and that was about to change. Since Jan didn't have a rifle, Cheryl gave her the Mini-14 to use and found time to teach her to shoot it. She had a 9mm pistol that Charles had gotten in Davenport.

I can tell you that Sagan et al. were basically right, the winters were a bear. We were snowed in more often than not once we had our first snowfall. The kids had a great time riding the horses during the summer when they weren't helping out. While everyone had cowboy guns, Cheryl and I were the only ones with rifle scabbards. It wasn't like a person could go online and order a rig from Alfonso, El Paso or Kirkpatrick. But, a hobbyist in Bethany produced custom leather goods and he made all of us real Hollywood western rigs and scabbards.

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Although we'd been driving Cheryl's car on a very limited basis, it threw a rod, without warning. The car didn't owe anyone anything and we weren't surprised when it happened. Frank had his car and Charles didn't have a vehicle so it was time to go to Des Moines, again. It was decided that whatever we got, it had to be diesel, new and had to run with a jump or a new battery. A pair of Dodge Ram Megacabs filled the bill. Who cared if Chrysler wasn't around anymore?

This trip to Des Moines wasn't like the past; people had come out of their hiding holes. They didn't care for visitors, either. The pickups had stickers in the \$53,000 range. They were 4 wheel drives with turbo diesel engines and 6 speed manual transmissions. In fact I liked them so much I traded even up and we siphoned the fuel from my pickup to

cans and filled up the 3 new pickups. Cheryl got the red one, I got the white. I believe our trips to Des Moines were over, except for refilling the tankers.

That summer everyone learned to ride the horses although Frank and Rose preferred the buggy. Since no one was farming the section of ground that our homestead came from, we decided we'd try our hand the following year. The farmer we worked the deal with said he'd swap us oat seed for our seed corn and would use his equipment and our labor. He strongly suggested we plant a large field of hay.

We butchered chickens for the first time and it included some hens that had stopped laying plus about 150 broilers. We hauled two steers and 8 hogs into Bethany and had them butchered, cut and wrapped. We planned to plant 20 acres in great northern beans and trade a portion of the production for things we wouldn't try to grow, like rice. The greenhouse was giving us a year around supply of greens and a few other vegetables and our outside garden was heavy on green beans, beets, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers and corn.

We were attacked about a week after we finished the garden harvest. We were outnumbered maybe 2:1. They had an assortment of sporting arms; we had an assortment of military type arms and ordnance. I sure wished we had the rockets, but we had a Tac-50 rifle with Raufoss. The only good those bulletproof vests did was slow down the Raufoss so it exploded. They got in a lucky shot and our only person with military experience took a bullet in the right bicep. It appeared to be through and through and didn't hit an artery so we slapped on a compression bandage and hauled him into Bethany when it was over.

"Darn, that hurts."

"They won't attack us again. They made me a little mad so I shot any survivors."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"You're going to have nightmares."

"No, we're going to have a baby."

"You're kidding."

"I swear. So, what did the doctor say?"

"It was a nurse, there is no doctor. It didn't hit anything vital. It will take a few months to heal and I have to take an antibiotic to prevent infection and she gave me a few pain pills."

“When can you go home?”

“As soon as I get my shirt and jacket on.”

“We gotta find some rockets.”

“Rockets? We didn’t even use the grenades!”

“I don’t care. The laws are only suspended for the duration.”

“Yeah, like maybe 20 years. I tend to believe that the political makeup has changed. There are a lot of dead liberals and a lot of living conservatives.”

“Do you think we’ll get back to our roots?”

“Yes and no. We won’t have slavery or some of the shortcomings the country had when it was founded. Overall, I believe it will be like what the founding fathers envisioned.”

“It’s going to be a struggle getting there.”

“Anything worth having is a lot of work. Are you ready to go, I am.”

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We found the rockets, eventually. There was a lot of abandoned farm equipment all over the country and we eventually got enough to farm our own land. We grew what we could and traded for what we couldn’t. The baby was a girl and we named her Cynthia Rose. Two years later we had a son, Donald Frank. The children took a lot of getting used to. It would have been fine if we hadn’t had grandma and grandpa spoiling them every chance they got.

The hard winters lasted for several years but there was no new ice age. The conservative President finally climbed out of Cheyenne Mountain and toured the country promoting elections to be held as dictated by existing laws. The remainder of Congress got in their last hurrah, they repealed all federal gun laws and the President signed the bill, the only law he’d ever signed. A new emphasis was placed on a smaller federal government and states’ rights.

However, much to his chagrin, the President was reelected. He pushed for and got the tax code drastically revised. There was a duty on imports and the income tax was replaced by a flat tax of 2½%, 5% or 10% of your gross earnings depending on your bracket. There were no loopholes and the brackets were a concession to get the new law passed.

Even so, the recovery was slow. Oh so very slow. The federal government was doing what it could to help the states when asked to do so. There weren’t any handouts, just

intercession to mediate unresolved issues. Efforts were taken to restore river traffic on the Mississippi and the rivers that fed it. Rail service was reintroduced to replace the trucks that had replaced the trains. We located a source for rice in Arkansas, the leading rice producing state in the country.

What didn't change was using mechanical equipment for farming. John Deere managed to get its Waterloo, Iowa plant running and was working on restarting Moline. Using the bean seed we produced the first year, we expanded and the following year expanded again. We were producing 320 acres of edible beans, 40 acres of alfalfa, 40 acres of oats and 235 acres of corn. Our bean harvest ran roughly 1,500 pounds per acre. We had other kinds of beans and began small reproduction plots with the hope that eventually we'd have seed for large white, small white and kidney. When we had enough seed, we switched from large white to small white and from small white to kidney.

Beans might be large generators of methane, but they're filling and relatively cheap. No doubt our production would have been higher with chemical fertilizers but we only used manure because we had a lot of manure. We rotated everything except the alfalfa, taking advantage of its perennial trait.

That private at the roadblock? He ended up being the National Guard liaison for Bethany. The boy might have been dumb as a rock, but he knew horse flesh. He came out to see Susan and started to drool at the sight of the Barbs and Morgans. Susan took him riding and you have thought that he'd been awarded a military medal. We had planned on getting in a little rifle practice that day and he bruised his chin when he saw the Tac-50. He'd seen them before, but never had the chance to shoot one. It was love at first shot.

"I don't know as I like him seeing Susan."

"He can't be more than 4 or 5 years older than she is. It won't be long before she doesn't need your permission to see him."

"He reminds me of Alfred E. Newman."

"Nah, Newman is better looking. But, I'll say this, the boy can shoot."

"He was just lucky."

"Now Dad, you're just going through what I will be someday."

"You did one thing right, a girl and a boy. She's older so he'll get quite the education growing up."

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We thought we'd seen the last of major trouble. Local law enforcement kept on top of the remaining post war gangs and with the lack of gun laws, most everyone was polite; an armed society is a polite society. The nature of people hadn't totally changed and there was still occasional robbery or murder. We hadn't really regressed as far back in history as had been envisioned. It was more like the 1920s in the US, except that alcohol was available and still taxed. I could afford to provide the liquor for the get together, but those cigarettes were real money makers. Tobacco was making a very slow comeback, despite the wailings of the non-smokers. These days, the smokers simply ignored them.

Kentucky and Tennessee were back in full production making more bourbon and drinking liquor. The weather hadn't allowed the production of beans in the Dakotas so we had a market for those beans we produced. While the US had in the past been a rice exporter, California rice production hadn't resumed and there were no foreign buyers anyway. Ice was rebuilding in the Arctic and on Greenland as well as Antarctica. The Gulf Stream had stopped dropping and was back to normal in an otherwise normal PAW.

We now had something we'd lacked for a few years, information. I learned about Alice and wasn't really surprised because she'd never contacted us in the years since the war. We also learned about things around the world. Of note was the fact that Israel was still there, but much larger having incorporated the West Bank, Golan Heights and the Negev permanently. One Iranian missile failed in the boost stage, a second failed to explode and the third destroyed Har Megiddo, being far off course. All of the Israeli bombs worked without malfunction, and they still had their missiles in reserve.

Russia, being so far north, was much like the scenes from Dr. Zhivago, Anna Karenina and especially War and Peace; snow and ice and more snow. The starving masses of China had mostly been killed off and the survivors weren't starving anymore. A new dynasty had been established, replacing the Communists. Our nearest railhead was in Osceola.

As far as cleaning up the destroyed cities, it would take several lifetimes, just as it had taken several lifetimes to build them originally. For the moment, the smaller compact federal government was operating from Peterson Air Force Base near Colorado Springs. Cheyenne Mountain was now operational 24/7 according to public radio. What could be recovered from DC was being stored for future use.

Perhaps the one thing I found most exciting was the replacement of the currency. The US Congress voted to return to the gold and silver standards with a fixed ratio between the two metals, 50:1. New silver coins were minted that were once again mostly silver, 90%. Gold coins were issued in various denominations of 22 carat gold. Absent a name for the new larger gold coins, the government resurrected the double eagle for the 2 ounce coin and called the 4 ounce coin it the Union. The gold coins used the same names as before, Tenth Eagle, Quarter Eagle, Half Eagle, Eagle, Double Eagle plus the Union. The Eagle contained one ounce of gold, the double 2 ounces and the Union 4.

I had a bit of a guilty conscience about the gun store in Des Moines and we traveled up there where we learned that the owner had died of a heart attack during the attacks. Neither Frank nor Charles had similar concerns about the stores in Davenport and I didn't suggest they do the same.

Basically, the Internet is a subset of the telephone system. It was being brought up, one switch at a time. About all a person could do was click on a bookmark or favorite and hope it came up. More often than not, they didn't. While the internet was being brought back up with a new address protocol was being implemented, IPv6 was replacing IPv4. The two systems were incompatible. While implementation of IPv6 had begun during 2009 and had been expected to be fully implemented in 2011, those with existing web-sites using the IPv4 addresses hadn't switched.

The mint at West Point was the only remaining mint and minting the volume of gold and silver coins required far exceed their capacity. New mints needed to be constructed to implement the new money standards. They had to be built in cities that hadn't been nuked, too. The mint at West Point was running 24/7 trying to meet the demand for the new coins. The federal government established the fixed value of gold at \$500 per troy ounce, thus determining the value of all coins. The 90% silver dollars contained 0.9 ounce of silver and consequently were a slightly smaller size and had a value of \$1. Fractionals were available as one-tenth, one-quarter and one-half the amount of silver in the silver dollar. The penny was discontinued due to a copper shortage. As you can see, things changed. The penny wasn't really made of copper since ~1982. It was 97.5% zinc and copper plated.

Now instead of being a carpenter and lead worker, I was a farmer with all the attendant problems. But I'd read *An Old Man and His Tractor* and we followed the example laid down, buy low and sell high. As our herds increased, we added additional silos and adopted more unused land moving to a section, a section and one half to two sections and finally three.

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We experimented with various crops and got hard and durum wheat to grow. We started with a quarter section of each, eventually planting a full section and producing around 26,000 bushels of each per season. We also became a large meat supplier, selling upwards of 100 head per year in the beginning to 500 head per year currently. The same went with pork; we kept the gilts and sold the barrows, occasional adding a new boar for genetic diversity. The average litter was about 50-50 gender wise and our herd of hogs expanded so rapidly, with two litters per year, we had to erect a separate hog house capable of handling 100 sows and their offspring.

We backed off producing truck farm items, limiting ourselves to a very large outside garden and the greenhouse. Pigs are faster money than beef because you get 2 liters per year, a short time to market weight and cattle generally produce a single calf that

takes 2 years to reach market weight. Finally we acquired an oil press and small industrial biodiesel plant and chemicals. We limited our gasoline to use in the chainsaws, the splitter motor and portable generators. Gasoline was now available at an outrageous price.

We again had local TV programming that still included the EAS. The NOAA NWS All Hazards Weather radio system was one of the first systems the government brought back online. Once it was up, we maintained a radio watch that included monitoring SAME (Specific Area Message Encoding) reports. We still went armed, usually with a handgun, everywhere except to bed or bath; it became second nature.

We had located and added Motorola VHF business radios and they were like an American Express Card, we never left home without them and at least a handgun. Since the CP-200s wouldn't reach the 5 miles to town, we also had enough of the portable 40 channel CBs to equip everyone and leave spares. Finally each vehicle had an Icom HF band radio. We replaced the guyed mast with a Tower and added beam antennas on a rotor in addition to the vertical 10-band antenna. Plus, I got a 440 MHz (70cm) antenna. Every operating vehicle had a ham radio, business radio and a CB. Even the tractors had CBs, just in case. The whole idea was avoiding getting caught flat footed

The word came around that electrical power would be restored within a few weeks. We sought out the transfer switches and installed them. We'd have the generator with the most engine hours checked by a diesel mechanic, and rebuild as necessary. We got the Dodge Rams licensed.

Oh, and we planted canola to extract canola oil to produce biodiesel. Our days were long and hard, leaving only Sunday's for free time and shopping. Every Sunday saw Jerry out visiting Susan and it looked to me like it was getting serious. He often came to me just to talk guns. The subject of Susan was never brought up. However one Sunday, he asked Don for permission to marry Susan. Apparently he got it, the next time I saw her she was wearing an engagement ring.

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The local TV affiliate broadcast a brief alert issued by the USGS in conjunction with the NWS concerning Yellowstone; I started to carry the All Hazards Radio. The Volcanic Activity Alert System has 4 levels: normal/green, advisory/yellow, watch/orange and warning/red. They advanced the level to yellow. This wasn't a big deal, it happened before.

I turned the radio over to the boy monitoring the radio and went back out to continue combining. When I'd told Cheryl what I'd heard, the gals went to Des Moines and hit Costco and both Sam's Clubs. They filled the pickup and trailer. We were well off enough financially to handle the purchases and more. They stopped in Osceola and added to their purchases. Since it was Sunday, Jerry was there to see Susan. I gave

him \$200 and ask Susan and him to go to Bethany and get a full 600' spool of $\frac{3}{8}$ " manila rope and a box of fencing staples.

About then, the girls arrived home and began unloading the pickup and trailer. I pushed to finish combining the canola. When the last load was offloaded, I headed for the house. I got 2 very large tarps and covered the combine. I planned to dig the potatoes and ask Don to combine the edible beans the following day. They had been canning tomatoes all along and once the acorn squash and potatoes were harvested, we'd only have the field corn to combine. I covered it all with Cheryl when I finally got to the house.

"You forgot the onions. We'll help with that. Want us to spread the potatoes on a tarp?"

"Yeah, there's room in the machine shed. Remind me to replace the filter in the shelter air system."

"Why don't you do it now, supper won't be ready for a while."

"Alright. What's for supper?"

"Boiled beans, fried potatoes and homemade bread."

It didn't take long to change the HEPA and carbon filters or the pre-filter. They came as a kit and cost \$700, about 20% of the cost of the entire system. However one system provided enough air for 10 people and we'd only used one of the four systems.

We didn't go into lock down for several reasons, the most important being that there had been no eruption. The second was that until we had an idea of how big the eruption would be, should it happen; there was no need to rush. Finally, as the government brought services back on line, they were done right. The NWS and the USGS were small, highly efficient organizations; I trusted them.

All in all, the risk to the population was lower because the population was lower, the final estimate from the National Guard census put it at 110 million. There were many deaths due to radiation poisoning, fewer due to disease because people knew not to drink the water without boiling it. People hid out, unsure of the radiation levels; perhaps that explained our experience with Des Moines. Be that as it may, we'd be ready, just in case.

Why eat boiled beans when there is steak in the freezer? We developed a taste for them. We never found ourselves in a position where it was eat beans or go hungry. One of Cheryl's favorites was goulash made with ground beef, onions, tomato sauce and diced tomatoes with a measure of chili powder and elbow macaroni. Since we now had our own wheat, we made our own pasta.

Cynthia was long out of diapers and Cheryl dressed her in jeans. Donald was taking longer to potty train, but getting close. He wouldn't get jeans until he was out of diapers, we used that as a potential reward.

The All Hazards radio didn't go off during the night so it appeared nothing happened at Yellowstone. Nevertheless we had our plans made for the day and while Don harvested the edible beans, I finished harvesting the garden, starting with the onions and then the squash followed by the potatoes. Our potato crop was extremely large but I wouldn't know how large until they were sacked in 100 pound bags. The kids helped, either by digging or by transporting the potatoes to the tarps in the machine shed so they could cure. My aching back told me when we were finished that we had as many as 6,000 pounds of potatoes.

I started combining the corn the following day. It was run through the dryer and added to the silo. If I'd have been thinking, I'd have had Charles dig the potatoes and I'd have started on the corn. Don would probably finish up the beans the next day and after switching to a corn head be able to help me finish up.

Charles was mainly responsible for the livestock and that was a fulltime job just managing the herds without actually doing the work. We were using survivors from Bethany and paying them part in beans and potatoes, part in meat plus a small wage. That rope I asked Jerry and Susan to get would be strung between the buildings in case of an eruption so we could tend to the stock.

Jerry had been able to bargain with someone in the guard and get a dozen M40 gas masks with new, sealed filters. He wasn't a private any more, liaisons were E-5s or up. Don had eventually taken a liking to him and when he approached Don before officially asking Susan to marry him, he was set. Nobody actually believed that Jerry and Susan hadn't discussed it beforehand. Heck, that's probably where he got the idea to ask her Dad. Strangely, the rings fit right out of the box. He had even managed to save up enough money to buy a used Barrett model 99 (single shot) in the Barrett .416 caliber with a good scope. Missouri didn't pay the National Guard troops very much.

By the end of the following day, Don was finished with the beans and I was $\frac{2}{3}$ done with the corn. It didn't warrant changing from the combine head to the corn head because I'd be done by noon. Instead, they began moving the stock up closer to the barns. Oh yeah, each type had its own barn now and the hen house had been razed and replaced.

We were starting to see some of those new gold and silver coins when we sold our produce, grain and livestock. Since all US money was coins and actual bullion coins, a Union was almost awkward. These went into a safe and I usually carried a double eagle and an assortment of smaller denominations. The good thing about paper money was that it wasn't heavy. The bad thing was it was backed by the full faith...and people had very little. The dime, quarter and half were all 90% contained one tenth, one quarter or one half ounce of 90% silver.

Recovery – Chapter 5

With the hurried harvest completed, we worked in and around the buildings. The potatoes cured and we had 61 bags. We would market 55 bags and hold the balance. Our horse herd now included a third breed, Percherons. We were breeding them and training them but not using them as field animals, the tractors were so much easier. We'd pull a float in the Independence Day Parade, but that was it.

We had our own blacksmith/welder and a full time farrier. What shoes we couldn't buy, were made right here in the smith's shop. The two men were brothers and while the farrier could make shoes, our herd was very large. Our Morgans were now used to herd the cattle and pulling the buggies while the Barbs were reserved for riding. We'd had to scour a wide area to get enough tack for our first two breeds and ended up getting an Amish group to make harnesses for the Percherons.

Our smith was a retired Navy Chief who could use any metalworking machine made and was often pressed into service making a scarce part for one of the farming machines. The local broadcast channel indicated that the USGS had downgraded Yellowstone to normal and we breathed a sigh of relief. Yellowstone was mainly monitored from Salt Lake City, a target. They now had a small crew of 4 people at the caldera doing the monitoring. The park was closed as a tourist attraction most of the time. The National Park Service was a low priority.

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Earlier...

"Jake, check these out."

"What do you have?"

"The latest seismograms. We have a large mass of magma moving."

"I see; you're right Paul, a very large mass. What do you think?"

"Well...when I came in, I was going to suggest going to orange. But I suppose we can start with yellow and work our way up."

"I certainly wouldn't want to go from green to orange on this evidence. What's the best way to handle it?"

"The NWS has their All Hazards radio net back up. I suggest you raise the level to yellow and give the information to them to disseminate."

"Ok, do it. We are now at yellow."

Deep in the earth, the magma encountered a particularly hard layer of rock and paused while the upper layer was melted. The magma was essentially frozen in place and the earthquakes stopped. Had they had a larger staff; they might have noticed that Old Faithfull's schedule changed very slightly. But this was post war America and they were lucky to have what funding they got. The administration had kept all the Volcano Observatories open, with limited staffs. Dr. Jacob B. Lowenstern, PhD Stanford, 1992, Scientist-in-Charge was just happy to still have a job. There were worries that someone might target Yellowstone although he doubted that would actually cause a major eruption.

The next day Paul came in with the latest seismograms.

"Huh, what do you make of that?"

"I was going to ask you the same question."

"It's stopped cold. Let's watch for a few more days, there's no way I'm going back to green after one day, we'd look foolish."

"But you agree that it was moving?"

"Yes, Paul, that was a good call. We'll give it a few days and then decide."

Later...

"That's three days of inactivity. It appears I was presumptuous."

"Make the call, we're now officially green."

At depth, the lava had succeeded in melting the hard layer of rock, losing heat in the process. It was, however, a churning mass and the fires were soon stoked from deep within the Earth. There were uncountable cracks in the rock that lay above and it oozed ever upward without the telltale seismic indications normally associated with magma moving. Finally, the very core of the Earth gave it a shove and forced a Volcanic explosion, the likes of which hadn't been seen in 2 million years. Jake nor Paul nor the other two scientists at Yellowstone gave a warning; they didn't have time to do anything except die. Science, at its best, is imperfect.

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"What's that racket? Oh, the All Hazards radio. I'll turn up the volume."

...indicate a massive eruption at Yellowstone Caldera. Everyone within a 100 mile radius of Yellowstone should take immediate shelter. Those in the 500 mile downwind range should make immediate arrangements to locate a shelter. We will make further announcements as information becomes available.

“I guess we got lucky and the Supervolcano was just running a few days late.”

“The shelter is going to be very full. There are the four of us, mom and dad, the four of Cindy’s family and the five of Charlie’s family.”

“Better make that five for Cindy, Jerry will no doubt show up. Sixteen will be crowded, but we can live with it. I sort of glad now that we got that earlier warning. I’d best wake everyone up and get the livestock sheltered and fed. I guess buying that rope wasn’t foolish after all.”

We got the herds tucked in, fed and the cows milked. We would be coming out of the shelter twice daily to milk the cows; the hogs were going to love that. Jerry showed up and I got him to string the ropes connecting all the buildings. We almost didn’t have enough rope.

This eruption, it seems, wasn’t as large in volume as the Huckleberry Ridge eruption 2 million years ago. That one put ash in our location. The most recent was the most widespread although it had less volume. We suited up to go milk the cows but no ash, yet. Better safe than sorry, I guess. The following morning, I checked before we suited up and donned masks. We were getting ash, but P-100 filters and goggles would do it. The hogs were ecstatic to get milk two days in a row. We hadn’t lost power,

“Well crap, much ado about nothing.”

“Maybe Don, let’s wait and see how much ash we get. It could just be enough to enrich the soil. I have a file on my laptop about Yellowstone that has a map on page 5 showing the various ash falls including the Bishop Tuff.”

“Which one, there are five.”

“The one titled ‘Yellowstone.pdf’.”

“Man you have a lot of files. You have a whole section of Army Field Manuals.”

“Some of those were in case I got something I had no experience using, like the LAW rocket. There is also one on hand grenades and pyrotechnics.”

“Yeah, I recognize a few of the numbers. Ok, page five. Hmm, Mesa Falls went the greatest distance but Huckleberry had the largest output and both covered this area.”

“Right, but not very deep. It could be different. Can you imagine what it would be like if both Yellowstone and Long Valley erupted? Say you add in a super eruption by Mt. St. Helens, which has been discussed.”

“We’d have ash butt deep on a 9’ Indian.”

“It would probably do more damage than the war; or, be right up there with it.”

“Don’t jinx us.”

“Check for a pdf file titled *Mount St Helens Supervolcano*. I copied an article from New Scientist dot com.”

“I see it.”

“It’s just a short article that raises more questions than it answers.”

“Were you surprised about Yellowstone?”

“That’s hard to say, Jacob Lowenstern didn’t seem to be particularly worried. It all came up because of the BBC special. Assuming a cycle of 600,000 years on average, it was 40,000 years overdue. I’ll have to admit that I considered it, but more in connection with one of our enemies nuking Yellowstone to cause an eruption. I guess it decided to erupt all on its own. I’m surprised we didn’t get more ash initially. Even so, we’ll get continual dusting as it settles out of the atmosphere.”

“You seem to know your share about this.”

“I’m no expert; it’s just some articles I read. Let’s say we get 3cm or about 1¼”. We could easily turn it under and probably increase our yields. Three hundred cm would give us close to 10’, we couldn’t live with that and would probably be forced to move. We’ve prepared for the worst, let’s hope the outcome is the best. That’s two, I wonder what number three will be.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“The assertion that bad things happen in threes.”

“An old wives tale.”

“Actually a Celtic Legend.”

The ash fall continued unabated. It was a light dusting that, when measured, amounted to almost exactly one inch in the area of Bethany, Missouri. Winter came very early that year. While they didn’t get much ash, their hurried up harvest was most timely. The snowfall, early as it was, didn’t reach near the scope of the snows after WW III. Don and Alan saddled up and checked out all three sections of ground they were now farming.

“If you’d have told me that I’d end up farming for a living ten years ago, I’d have had you certified and locked up.”

“You and me both Don. It’s working though and we have more now than we had before the war. Is everyone satisfied with the distribution of the income from the operations?”

“They’re as happy as hogs in a new wallow. Anything they contributed stays with them and anything they had a part in processing generates a share. Are you making out ok?”

“I’ve got a lot of Unions and double Eagles in the safe. I’m going to have to come up with a better way to carry coins. Maybe I’ll get a purse.”

“Right, would that be cute. Get a vest with those pockets, like they wore in the cowboy movies.”

“I just might do that, thanks. Let’s cross to the other side of this section and head back the way we came.”

“Doesn’t look half bad, not much ash. It will be easy to turn that in as soon as we can get in the fields. Have you figured out what we’re going to plant next year?”

“I was thinking we’d plant this section in canola. We’d plant the middle section half in corn and half in soybeans. The original section, expand the pasture to 160 in clover mix less the homestead, about 150-155. Plant a quarter section each of edible beans, oats and alfalfa.”

“I don’t know what made me think of it, but I find it ironic that Cindy and I eat more beans and rice than meat. And, Black Angus beef was the hot ticket in the first decade.”

“Cheryl and I like beans and eat a lot of them. Those and her goulash made with tomato sauce in addition to the diced tomatoes and with a bit of chili powder.”

“Cindy isn’t much on chili powder. Invite us over sometime; I’d love to try it.”

“Can do, but it will probably be next week.”

“Did anyone put out any figures on how big that eruption was?”

“The NWS said just slightly smaller than the previous, about 400km³. Those four scientists were all killed in the eruption.”

“I’ve got another question.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Do you remember that rule of threes? Do we count near misses?”

“Well, in the case of the eruption, it was a massive eruption and we did get some ash. So I’d count it and say, *That’s two.*”

“And how good is this rule?”

“Sometimes works and sometimes doesn’t. After I read about it in a story, I followed a few life events. That was just my experience, why?”

“Well...if it was iron clad, we’d still have another disaster headed our way.”

◦

“Man is that good, can I have another bowl? Cindy, do you think you could make this?”

“I can make it, but I’d prefer it without the chili powder.”

“That’s what makes the dish. It and the tomato sauce; or was it tomato paste Cheryl?”

“No, sauce, not paste. Homemade tomato sauce. It’s made from reduced plum tomatoes, onion, garlic, a scant amount of sugar and a little broth that the onions and garlic were simmered in.”

“We have some of the sauce, Don, everybody does. I could make it this way without the chili powder.”

The conversation continued through dinner with the subject of how to make goulash quickly dropped. Don knew when he was beat when Cindy suddenly changed the subject. If he pushed the issue, she was going to make him pay; think blanket on the couch. The conversation turned to what the third, and hopefully final, disaster might be. Tornadoes evolved to additional volcanic eruptions and the eruptions evolved to asteroids and comets. Little did we know...

◦

Shaped rather like a human kidney, the rock was made of almost pure iron-nickel. It was about 5km in diameter by about 10km long. It had been moved from its home in the Kuiper Belt by one of the more normal sized objects with a diameter of 100km. Thus it began its journey into our solar system. It would have passed through cleanly except for the gravitational effects of the fifth planet. Its course thus altered, it would proceed to the Sun and loop around to exit the solar system.

However, the slight change in its path doomed it and one of the planets during its exit. Much like the Barringer Crater in Arizona, it would leave a large scar on the landscape of North America, specifically the Central US and exactly in northern Missouri. It was almost as big as the rock that created Chicxulub Crater and killed off the dinosaurs. It would begin to burn up in the atmosphere and the crater would be 80km across.

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We had taken the kids up north with us on a fishing trip. We could have fished any of the lakes in Missouri, but chose instead to fish a small lake north of Des Moines, It was SE of the town of Jewell and called Little Wall Lake. The crappie fishing was outstanding and the fish would bite any yellow colored lure you threw at them. I suppose that Jewell was about 140 miles north of Bethany as the crow flies.

Tired of a steady diet of fish, we decided to go into Jewell and get something with beef, pork or chicken in it. One restaurant was decidedly new age; it was built below a concrete block building and had served as a shelter for the owners during WW III. It was formed of reinforced poured concrete that I would later learn was 12" thick. There was a bulletin board with pictures of the owners during their shelter stay and even a copy of the log the guy made concerning their stay. To foster the shelter image, the old blast door was opened and closed as each customer entered or exited. It was located on the north side of the basement. Personally, I would have put it on the south side, but they were apparently afraid of Des Moines being hit.

I had finished up my deluxe California hamburger and was just starting in on my breaded pork tenderloin sandwich when we experienced a massive earthquake, throwing us from our chairs. I sensed that the ground was actually being lifted and after several moments felt it fall. A blast wave of unimaginable strength blew the concrete block building off its foundation, exposing the bare earth that was compacted 6' high over the actual shelter.

It suddenly became unbearably hot and the owner spun the wheel dogging the hatch in place. The air filtration system was switched on but nothing other than super heated air came out so it was switched back off. This guy took his preparations seriously and had several carbon dioxide absorbers plus two dozen bottles of welding grade oxygen (93% pure). He dug in a cabinet and got a meter that measured percentage of various gases in the air.

It was early afternoon, around 2:00, and the only people in the shelter were the four of us, the owner, his wife the cook and their son the inside doorman, who had dogged the hatch when his father yelled. We were subject to a rain of rocks for hours. Even the poured concrete walls and the overhead were hot to the touch and remained so for some time.

"Do you have any idea what that was?"

"It could have been a nuke, but I doubt it. It could have been an earthquake, but I doubt that too. Best guess, an impact event, not all that far away. You don't live around here do you?"

"No. We have three sections near Bethany, Missouri."

"What are you doing up here?"

“We were fishing at Little Wall Lake. We got tired of a steady diet of fish and decided to come into town for something besides fish.”

“We’ll have power for quite some time. I put in a 40,000 gallon diesel tank after the war and it’s full of biodiesel. We have twin 30kw generators. They were originally the generator and backup for the shelter. After the war, I had an electrician rewire the setup so we could use all 200 plus amps for the restaurant when needed. We’ve started shutting down and will be on a single generator soon.”

“Impact event? I guess that would make it three, WW III, Yellowstone and an impact.”

“That’s an old wives tale.”

“Actually, it’s a Celtic legend and I wasn’t sure whether to believe it or not.”

“Did you have three sections before the war?”

“Nah, we had five acres. We’re just farming the remainder of our section and two others. We don’t actually have clear title.”

“What did you do before the war?”

“Construction and my wife Cheryl was a waitress.”

“Nice kids. If you don’t mind me saying, you’re on the high side of child bearing years.”

“We tried for years and after we were resolved to it not happening, it happened. Do you have any idea how long before we can leave?”

“I don’t have a clue. Probably when the rocks stop falling and it cools off; days, for sure, possibly weeks or months. We won’t go hungry or thirsty.”

“Not that you’re asking, but we can pay for the food we eat. I always carry one double Eagle.”

“I hope you have something smaller; nobody can eat \$1,000 worth of food.”

“We carry a mix, just in case.”

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The center of the crater was about four miles the other side of Bethany, but it didn’t matter; the three sections and all the people, buildings, equipment and livestock had been vaporized or thrown who knows where. We were able to leave the shelter in two weeks although it was as hot as Arizona in the middle of summer. We found my pickup which

held our firearms and extra clothes. We ended up circumnavigating the crater in another vehicle, hoping against hope to find survivors. But, we ended up back in Jewell with what little we had.

We were by no means destitute, having brought 2 Unions and almost double our usual coinage. We probably had half of our clothing, having planned on a long trip. While it wasn't the most important thing, we had the majority of our firearms and a relatively large amount of ammo. I had debated with myself long and hard, but in the end included the Tac-50 and most of the .50 caliber ammo, just in case.

Scientists began showing up at the new crater before it had even cooled. Cheryl went to work in that same restaurant as a waitress and I ended up doing construction for the scientific teams building more permanent shelters. They paid promptly and paid well. Cheryl began to accumulate a large number of one ounce silver coins, they also tipped well.

We hadn't brought our cowboy guns and never replaced them. We grew old as the kids grew up. We retired right there with me spending most of my days on the Lake fishing. It had been vaporized in the impact but slowly refilled and was restocked with crappies, bass and other species. We had a good run and survived the worst that man and Nature could throw at us. Some of it was good planning and some of it by pure chance.

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